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U. S. Department of Agriculture

HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Wednesday, September 12, 1934.

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "Soy Beans -- the Poor Man's Meat and the Poor Man's Milk." Information from Bureaus of Plant Industry and Home Economics, U.S.D.A.

--ooOoo--

A week or so ago we talked about the Great Drought of 1934, and what effect it will have on our winter food supply. As I told you then, there will be enough food to go around, although we may be called upon to try new foods and to try old foods in new ways.

One of the new-old foods that may help to keep adequately nourished is the soybean. While they are green, soybeans can take the place of other green vegetables. Later, when they are mature, we can use them in place of meat, if the meat supply runs low. The protein of soybeans is much like that of the "efficient" protein of lean meat and eggs.

Since the day I mentioned them, I've had several requests from listeners who want to know how to cook soybeans. For those of you who are interested there is a collection of recipes -- fifteen or sixteen, including a casserole dish, a salad, a soup, a souffle, and a number of other dishes. Send your request to the Bureau of Home Economics, in Washington, D. C., and you will receive a copy of the soybean recipes.

I've learned a lot about soybeans the past week. Of course, I knew something about them in a general way. I knew they'd been cultivated in China and Japan since ancient times, and I knew that soybeans made a delicious sauce for sauce Oriental dishes as the Chinese chow-mein and the Japanese suki-yaki.

But I did not realize until lately that the soybean is the most important legume grown in Asiatic countries. An ancient proverb calls it "the poor man's meat and the poor man's milk." The Japanese, the Chinese, the Koreans -- depend upon the soybean for the proteins, the fats, the calories and the vitamins they cannot get in any other way. Bean milk, fed to thousands of Chinese and Japanese babies, is made by crushing the beans, adding water, and then heating.

If you visit the markets of the Orient, you'll see blocks of freshly made bean curd, called "tofu" -- t-o-f-u. The soybean curd is the principal food of both China and Japan. It is eaten, in one form or another, at every meal.

Mr. George E. Sokolsky, writer and traveler, has this to say about tofu, or bean curd:

"Salted bean curd for breakfast tastes something like Roquefort cheese.... Bean curd soup is relished -- though not usually by the Westerner at first. Bean curd fried in bean oil gives off a tremendous odor; yet this dish is sold piping

hot on the streets by house-to-house peddlers bearing charcoal stoves on their shoulders. Children love it, and I have seen great statesmen drop their discussions of matters purely mundane to send for fried curds.

"Bean curd may be cooked in many styles. Or it may be eaten raw. Or it may be mashed to a paste, sweetened and used as a filling for pastry...."

Mr. Sokolsky describes a dinner served him when he put up at a Buddhist temple, while he was traveling in the interior of China. From the temple kitchen, he says, came the aroma of rich, spicy dishes. Before long the dinner was served-- first what looked like a fish, done to the second, with a sweet and sour sauce. Then the likeness of a whole chicken, swimming in a golden chicken soup. Vegetables and delicate spices were on every hand.

"You are too polite," says Mr. Sokolsky, "to denounce the monks as imposters -- as men who actually eat of the fish and the fowl in violation of their creed" -- yet there they are. "Then you taste the food. It proves to be beans -- all beans. The cook's repertoire included beans of a thousand tastes, bean curd molded to look like anything under the sun, to have any color, to taste nearly, yet not quite, like the thing it appears to be. A meal of beans, and beans alone, can be had, with every dish different and none of them tiresome. What other vegetable can accomplish so much? Where else but in China and Japan could such magic really occur day by day?"

I can't answer those questions -- clever as American housewives are, I don't believe they could disguise a meal of beans alone to make it look -- and almost taste -- like fish and fried chicken. Of course, in America we're just beginning to experiment with a food that the Orientals have been eating for -- well, some authorities say for more than fifty centuries. Perhaps it takes a great disaster like the recent drought to make us appreciate the soybean as human food.

Mr. W. J. Morse, with the Bureau of Plant Industry, gave me some facts about soy beans. Mr. Morse says that before 1908 -- which was only a very short time ago -- the soy bean trade was largely confined to China, Manchuria, and Japan; now soy beans are becoming more and more important in world commerce. The soy bean was introduced into the United States about 1804, and for a good many years was only a botanical curiosity. Now it is considered one of our most important forage crops, and indications are that it will be used more than ever as a very desirable food product.

Now, to come back to the recipes. If you live in a community where you can get soybeans, you may want to try them, either green or dried. Prepare the dried soybeans in much the same way as you do navy and other dried beans, but remember that the soybeans require longer soaking and much more cooking. Soybeans are so rich in fat that you needn't add extra fat in cooking -- except for a little meat fat or butter, for the sake of flavor.

I won't describe the special recipes this morning -- for I'm sure you'd rather read the printed directions than hear me tell about them. You can get copies of the soybean recipes from the Bureau of Home Economics, Washington, D.C.

